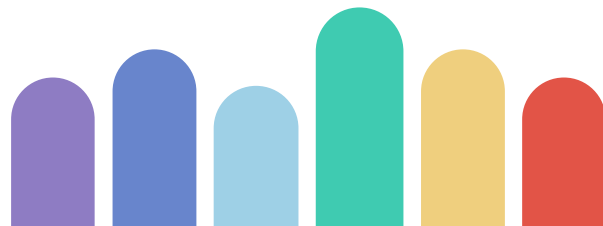


# Managing Big Feelings



Katy Kessler Everhart, MOT, OTR

*Occupational Therapist & Trauma Informed Care Specialist*





# Hello!

- Indy based occupational therapist
- Specialized in pediatrics, trauma informed care, hippotherapy, vision, and feeding
- Practice in both outpatient and early intervention (0-3)
- Ehler's Danlos Syndrome
- **\*\*Disclaimer\*\*** not all things will work for every child. You are the expert on your child



# Agenda

- Brain states
- Connect
- Empower
- Sensory
- Correction
- Resources



# Think of Your Child

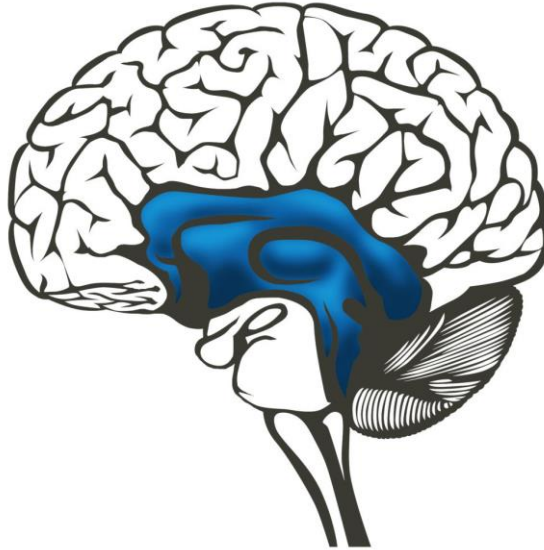
-Identify 1-2 situations that occur at home that you can keep in mind through the presentation

# Brain States



## Prefrontal Cortex

Learning, Focused, Calm  
Language, problem solving  
Not developed until late 20s



## Midbrain

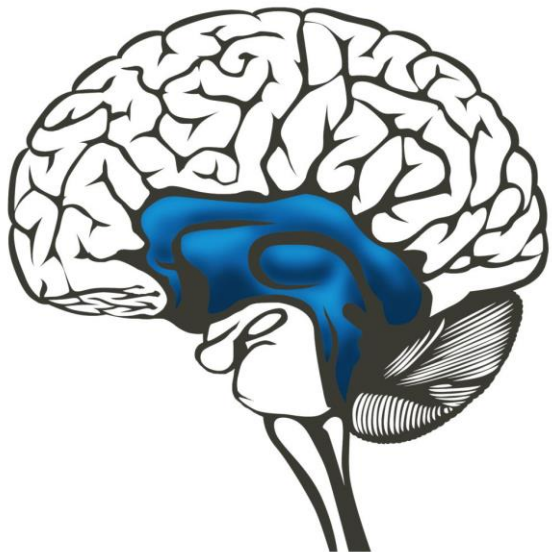
Flight and Fight take over  
Stress response  
Unable to access language



## Brainstem

Survival  
Heart rate & breathing

## Brain State: in meltdown

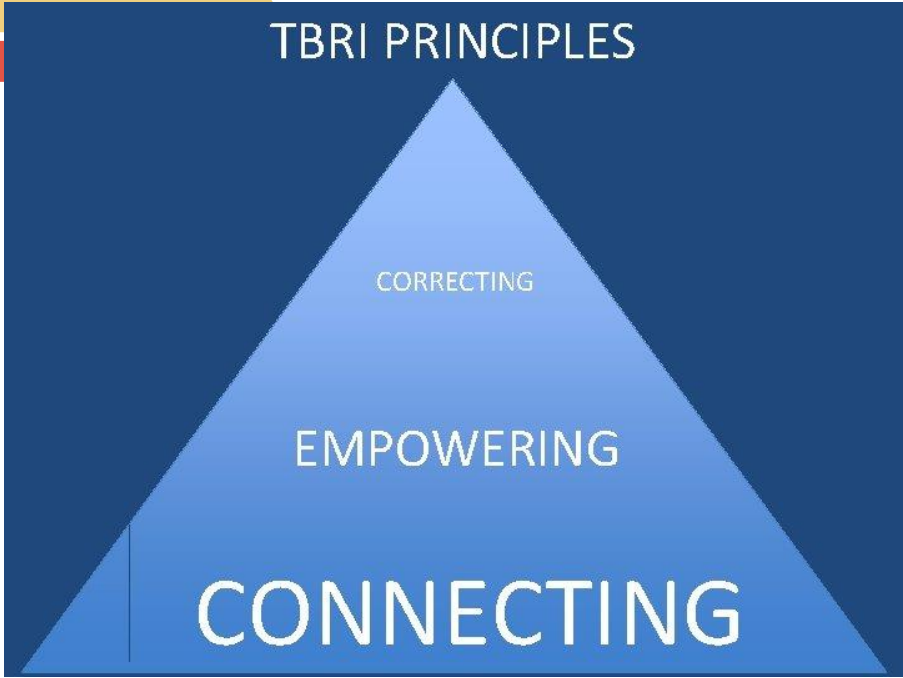
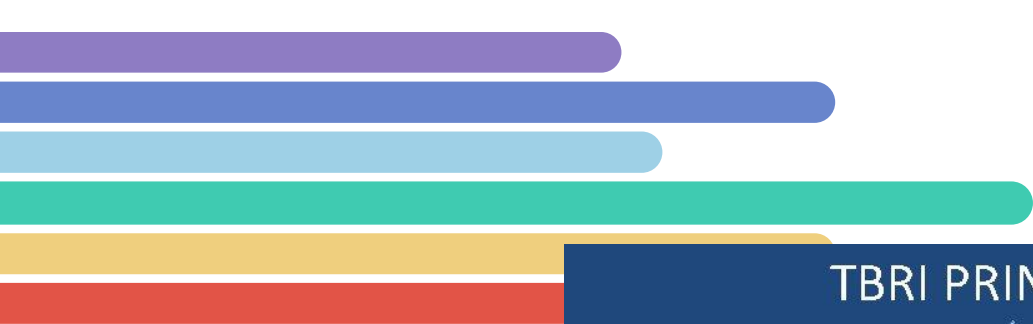


Flight and Fight take over  
Stress response  
Unable to access language

# Cortisol Loop- Midbrain

- **Cortisol:** Stress hormone. Nearly every cell has cortisol receptors = full body response.
- **Amygdala (midbrain) :**
  - Smoke detector of brain- scanning body constantly,
  - Developed by 6 mo. in utero.
  - Sends to thalamus → thalamus to pituitary to release cortisol
- **Prefrontal cortex**
  - helps make decisions to calm and regulate.
- **Flooding-**
  - Repeated exposures can cause flooding
  - Impacts connection to pre-frontal cortex (ACES or adverse childhood experiences)
  - Impacts attachments, impulse control, sleep, sensory regulation





Trust Based Relational Intervention- Dr. Karyn Purvis





# Connect Before Correct

- Why connection matters
- 10 minutes a day: Child led, limited demands, full attention
- Big changes in routine- dance it out



# Connection

- Affirmations and encouragement- Effort based over skill based increases internal motivation and self efficacy
- “You must feel so proud of yourself!”
- “ I believe in you!”
- Listening
- Healthy safe touch



# Empower

Co-regulation is a precursor to self regulation

## Teaching coping mechanisms

- Model it- “Wow, I’m feeling my body is frustrated- look my hands are tight and my breathing is fast. I’m going to take 5 deep breaths”
- Label their emotions
- Teaching coping skills when calm
- For Littles:
  - Sesame Street Breathe app
  - Daniel Tiger
  - Cosmic Kids Yoga
  - Books!
- For Biggers:
  - Yoga
  - Any physical activity that feels good
  - Art
  - Teaching more about the brain
  - Be curious about heart rate using a pulse oximeter and different activities

# Empower

- Hungry? Tired? Thirsty?
- Validation
- Routines and timers
- Specific





# Empower

- How does your child learn best?
- Choices vs Commands
- Collaboration and Compromise

# Sensory & Cups

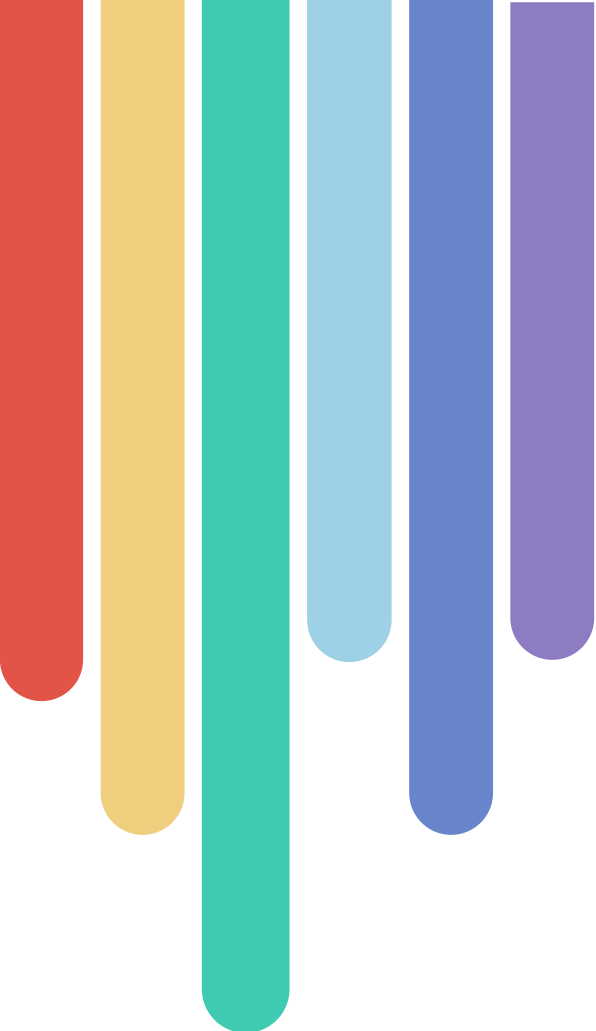


- Touch, taste, sight, smell, sound, proprioception, vestibular, interoception
- Everyone has different sized cups
- Cups should be full but not overflowing
- Too much input or too little input makes it hard to stay in prefrontal cortex
- More from Kaylin Shiver to come!



# Sensory: Interoception

- Low external body awareness often equates to low internal body awareness
- Not recognizing sensations until they are at the point of explosion
- Connect with an OT!
- Label and validate emotions to place names to them while in pre-frontal cortex



**Correction:** connection and empowerment are important to have for correction to be effective

- Playful engagement: *Talking shoes*
- Notice your own brain state/regulation
- Power Struggles
- Consequences that make sense
- Fear based punishment is not effective long term  
Multiple studies have shown that physical punishment – including spanking, hitting and other means of causing pain – can lead to **increased aggression, antisocial behavior, physical injury and mental health problems for children.**





# Correction: Tools to Try

- Setting expectations preemptively
- Body language
- Be an observer
- Re-dos, Re-dos, Re-dos!
- Time-Ins
- Problem solving



# Correction: When there's an explosion

- Remember the brain states
- Less. Words.
- Co-regulate: Safety, breathing
- Reconnect and discuss when pre-frontal brain turns back on
- Always a good kid.



# Examples: Big Anger

- Remember brain states
- Identify the feelings, match their tone “You sound really annoyed with your sister right now”  
*Avoid dismissing their feelings “It’s no big deal”*
- Model regulation- deep breathing, safe touch
- Give choices
- Problem solve
- Give time



# Example: Sass

- Playful engagement rewind
- Redo
- Setting boundaries
- Is there a physical or emotional need that needs met?



# Examples: Fighting Siblings

- If it's physical: acknowledge feelings but separate  
“I can't let anyone get hurt, I'm going to move you to stay safe”
- Reflect both feelings “You really didn't like it when...” “Both of you wanted to use the same..”  
*Avoid taking sides*
- Problem Solving- brainstorm ideas



# Resources

- The Whole Brained Child: Dan Siegel
- Parenting from The Inside Out: Dan Siegel
- How to Talk So Little Kids Will Listen: Joanna Faber and Julie King
- The Connected Child- Karyn Purvis
- Easterseals Crossroads Parent's Night Out respite program



# Next Steps:

- Pair and share 2 minutes



Questions?

